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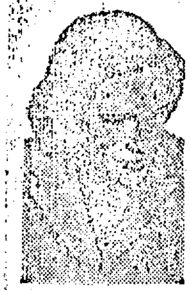
Latins Upset by Hint Mann Wants Out



By VIRGINIA PREWETT

Washington's Latin American diplomatic corps is shaken by reports that President Johnson's right-hand man for Latin America, Thomas C. Mann, wants out. He wants to leave his post of Presidential Special Assistant and Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, it is said, and return to private business.

No one could blame Mr. Mann if he did just that.

In less than a year as President Johnson's top representative for Latin America, he has garnered more U.S. foreign policy victories in that area than the U.S. has won for decades. Yet the U.S. Congress has seen fit to pull the rug out from under Mr. Mann's successful Latin American program.

Congress has done this by turning short-sightedly nationalistic on economic matters. To quiet election-year uproar over three farm products, the Congress has just about scrapped for now any U.S. chance to build on diplomatic successes won by the Johnson-Mann team.

KEY PRODUCTS

The commodities concerned are meat, coffee and sugar. One or another of these products is an important export to the U.S. from almost every Latin American country. For a majority of Latin American nations, either coffee or sugar exports are a major source of the dollars they use to buy essential imports from the U.S.

The U.S. Congress this year has restricted meat imports and refused to guarantee Latin America's U.S. sugar market for the first time in decades. Furthermore, Congress has refused to approve legislation implementing the World Coffee Agreement, after we ourselves spent a tremendous amount of diplomatic effort to create it.

Latin Americans today are deeply angry over all this. The top policy group for the Alliance for Progress, the Inter-American Committee called CIAP, is meeting this week. If CIAP does not launch a broadside over congressional policy on Latin American exports to the U.S., then the Johnson Administration will be unusually lucky.

IN THE MIDDLE

Ambassador Mann, who tried almost desperately to get Congress to see reason on the Latin American imports, is caught squarely in the middle.

When Tom Mann took over, our Latin American policy had for years been nothing more than a field of scrimmage.

Two groups in the State Department warred over it. Strong-minded cliques in the Agency for International Development, in the Pentagon, in the CIA, among the lending agencies, each had its own notion. At every crisis, teams were hastily thrown together and the battle swayed back and forth till one side carried the day.

Ridiculous as it may seem, the U.S. in effect had no policy for Latin America, only a series of episodes. To return to this would be disastrous.